(d) As per the Indian Emigration Act, 1983, the recruitment of Indian workers has to be done by the recruiting agents duly authorised by the Protector General of Emigrants, Ministry of Labour. The Protector General of Emigrants in India and our Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia keep a constant vigil over the recruitment process.

(e) Whenever, specific instances of malpractices by the recruiting agents are noticed, action is taken by the Protector General of Emigrants against the concerned recruiting agents under the Indian Emigration Act of 1983. Our Embassy/Consulate in Saudi Arabia remain in regular touch with the Protector General of Emigrants on the issue.

(f) Does not arise.

Free Trade Zone for ASEAN

†1718. SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH:Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India had made a proposal to ASEAN an organization of ten South East Asian countries for creating a Free Trade Zone;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are keeping in touch with the concerned countries; and

(d) if so, the progress made so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d) At the India-ASEAN Summit at Phnom Penh on November 5, 2002, Prime Minister has proposed the setting up of an India-ASEAN Free Trade Area within ten years. An India-ASEAN Task Force on Economic Linkages is to prepare a draft Framework Agreement within one year, which will address this proposal and related initiatives for expansion of India-ASEAN economic relations. The first meeting of the Task Force will be held in New Delhi from 18-21 December, 2002.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.